Re. Request to Persuade Opposition Leaders to Participate in the Proceedings of Parliament

SHRI RAVULA CHANDRA SEKAR REDDY (Andhra Pradesh): Sir, we have not been attending the House for the past few days. This is due to the casual attitude of the Government towards the Opposition. The vindictive attitude of the UPA Government has forced the Opposition to boycott the Parliamentary proceedings. Sir, the attitude of UPA Government towards the Opposition is most deplorable. The statements of some leaders of the Congress Party have also contributed to this unfortunate episode. Neither the Prime Minister nor the Parliamentary Affairs Minister tried to resolve the issue. For a health democracy the role of the Opposition is very important. The UPA Government is ignoring this aspect. We have boycotted the proceedings on a principle and we thought that the Government would come forward and resolve the issue. On the one hand, the Government is not willing to have a dialogue with the Opposition; and, on the other hand, they are trying to further precipitate the issue. Sir, the people of our country will take note of this casual attitude of the Government towards the Opposition. While condemning the attitude of the Government, we would like to participate in the proceedings of the Parliament under protest. Even now the hon. Prime Minister can resolve the issue by inviting the Opposition and persuade them to participate in the proceedings in the larger interest of the nation and parliamentary democracy.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

MR. CHAIRMAN: Question No. 581

Cheating by Authorised PCO booth owners

*581. SHRI LALIT SURI: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware that a large number of authorised PCO booth owners in Delhi are cheating the PCO users for local calls by manipulating the timing device;

(b) if so, whether any surprise checks are conducted to ensure that PCO owners do not indulge in such irregularities; and

(c) if so, in what manner and if not, why?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI DAYANIDHI MARAN): (a) to (c) A statement is laid on the Table of the House.

Statement

Cheating by Authorised PCO Booth Owners

(a) Yes, Sir. Complaints on local PCOs for overcharging are received from time to time. The Complaints are mainly towards charging of Rs. 2/- by PCO owners instead of normal charge of Re. 1/- for 90 seconds pulse which has since been revised to Rs. 2/- for 120 seconds pulse with effect from 01.04.2005 in MTNL, Delhi. No tampering of timing device for local calls have been reported in MTNL, Delhi.

(b) Yes, Sir. Periodic/surprise checks are carried out by the staff and the Vigilance Cell besides entertaining consumer complaints.

(c) Sir, normally, a 16 Khz pulse is sent to the STD PCOs to operate the charging devise, installed at STD PCO location. For local calls, timing device is used by the PCO operator to disconnect/extend the call after stipulated period.

During checks, calls are made posing as customer to ascertain the correctness of charging. If any irregularities are noticed, warning and notice is given to the PCO owner for corrective action. In case of repeated/ serious complaints, the PCO is disconnected permanently.

SHRI LALIT SURI: Mr. Chairman, Sir, there is a large network of PCO booths. Most PCO booths also have ISD and STD facilities. Whereas the rates for ISD and STD calls over the years have been reduced, the rates and pulse of the local PCO calls have registered appreciable changes over the years. In the event of the changes of pulses, it is the responsibility of the MTNL staff to make adjustments in the machines, which they hardly do leaving the job to booth owners to make or not to make the changes as they like, while charging the revised higher rates. The rates are hardly displayed in the booths. However, when the MTNL staff make changes in the machines the booth owners tamper to adjust the pulse for their benefit. The present rate of pulse for two minutes is for 120 seconds is Rs. 2/ where earlier ..

MR. CHAIRMAN: Please put your question.

SHRI LALIT SURI: Sir, the question is that the hon. Minister has already in his reply said very clearly that this process and this thing do happen. But he has not said and I would like to know from him how many complaints have come to him and what is the action he has taken so far against them?

SHRI DAYANIDHI MARAN: Sir, I would like to tell the hon. Member that last year alone 7151 surprise checks were done in all the PCOs throughout the country. Sir, we have taken actions against all the PCOs which were having faulty meters, or, not displaying the tariffs. It is an on-going process. We are continuously monitoring it.

SHRI LALIT SURI: Sir, my second supplementary is this. Whether it is true that there is no provision in the contract between the BSNL/ MTNL and the PCO booth owners for imposing penalty or taking any legal action, or, even terminating the agreement on this particular issue.

SHRI DAYANIDHI MARAN: Sir, I would like to inform the hon. Member that most of the pulse rates are set at the exchange for PCOs. Whenever we find that they are not following the prescribed norms, we take action against them. If it is found that they have faulty meters and are wilfully engaging themselves in unlawful practices, we cancel and terminate their licences.

DR. K. MALAISAMY: Sir, major irregularities are reported in the case of private service providers for basic telephone services and cellular services. So, I would like to know from the hon. Minister as to what are the major irregularities that have been reported from various parts of the country. Who are the top-ranking private service providers liable for this? What are all the extra efforts/all out efforts the Ministry is taking? The hon. Minister is saying that he is doing this and that. They are always there. The Department is in existence for several decades now and the system is also in existence since decades. I would like to know what extra efforts the Ministry is taking to plug this kind of lapses.

SHRI DAYANIDHI MARAN: Sir, basically, I hope the hon. Member's question is relating to PCOs, not a general one. If it is relating to PCOs, as I explained earlier, we can do this only through surprise checks. Majority of the PCOs are run by the BSNL in the country and by the MTNL in Delhi

& Mumbai. Now, even private operators are offering PCO services to public. Earlier there were complaints that, when the local call rate was Re. 1 for 90 seconds pulse, the PCOs were overcharging the customer by collecting Rs. 2 and not returning the balance. So, to avoid this, both, the BSNL and the MTNL Delhi have decided to increase the local call charge to Rs. 2 with a pulse of 120 seconds. The idea behind is that the customer gets due value for his money and PCOs will not overcharge. We also give more incentives to PCOs. We are also increasing their commission to ensure that PCOs do not try to fleece customers. Sir, specific complaints are very rare. Most of the complaints are attended to by the Department or the operators when they go on check. If there is any specific complaint, instead of a general one, I assure the hon. Member that the Department will definitely take action, because it becomes easy for us to perform our duty.

डा॰ कुमकुम राय: सभापति महोदय, प्रश्न के भाग ''ग'' का उत्तर देते हुए मंत्री जी ने बताया है कि जो पीसीओ मालिक अनियमितताएं करते हुए पाये जाते हैं और बार-बार वार्निंग देने के बाद भी वह नहीं सुधरते हैं, तो उनका पीसीओ परमानेंटली डिसकनेक्ट कर दिया जाता है। मेरा प्रश्न आपके माध्यम से मंत्री जी से यह है कि कई बार उनके ऊपर करोड़ों और लाखों के बिल बकाया रह जाते हैं, ऐसे पीसीओ जो बंद कर दिये जाते हैं, उनका मामला लम्बा खिचता चला जाता है। मैं यह पूछना चाहती हूं कि जिला उपभोक्ता फोरम में ऐसे कितने मामले हैं? आपके टेलीफोन विभाग में भी ऐसे कितने मामले हैं? टेलीफोन विभाग की कितनी राशि ऐसे मामलों में लम्बित है?

SHRI DAYANIDHI MARAN: I don't have the information right now with me. I will send the information to the hon. Member.

*582 [The questioner (Shri Balwant Alias Bal Apte was absent for answer *vide* page 44].

Exploration of Space

*583. SHRI SHAHID SIDDIQUI: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) what new projects are being planned for the exploration of Space during the next three years;

(b) whether there is any project to send a man to Space, if not, the reasons therefor;